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RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5647
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3365
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3229
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3890
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3880

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001147

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [SCUL](#) [EAIR](#) [TX](#)
SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN:

REF: ASHGABAT 1146 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Charge Sylvia Reed Curran for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Charge met September 10 with Kyrgyz Ambassador Ashyrov to discuss the issue of students denied exit to study abroad. This problem has affected those wishing to study in Kyrgyzstan more than any other group of students, because more Turkmen study in Kyrgyzstan than in any other single foreign country. Ashyrov believes this change in policy is a result of a Cabinet of Ministers meeting in June that focused on education. He said some officials strongly believe that they have a right to decide where Turkmen citizens study. Ashyrov denied that any Turkmen students had participated in protests in Kyrgyzstan. Whatever the reason or impetus for denying exit to students, it, in effect, denies them the fundamental human right of freedom of movement. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) Charge met September 10 with Kyrgyz Ambassador Borubek Ashyrov to discuss the problem of students being denied exit to study abroad. Until recently, more Turkmen chose to study in Kyrgyzstan than any other foreign country. Some reports claimed that as many as 6,000 students studied in Kyrgyzstan during the last academic year. Students wanting to study in Kyrgyzstan (including those at American University of Central Asia in Bishkek - AUCA) were the most affected by this change in policy, because, at one point, no students were able to travel to any Kyrgyz university. Ashyrov asserted that some students have been able to leave to study at state universities in Kyrgyzstan.

13. (C) Ashyrov said that his embassy first became aware of this problem in July. At first, his assumption was that this policy was directed at Kyrgyzstan. He attempted to meet with the Ministry of Education, but they directed him to MFA. Discussions with Migration Services officials at the airport confirmed that they were preventing students from departing based on a directive from Ministry of Education that required all students to get a stamp from the Ministry. During a meeting at MFA, Deputy Foreign Minister Wepa Hajiyev assured Ashyrov that this move has nothing to do with Kyrgyz-Turkmen relations. Calls to the Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan embassies revealed that some Turkmen students wanting to study in their countries were also being stopped at the

airport or not given permission stamps by the Ministry of Education.

14. (C) According to Ashyrov, this current problem stems from a Cabinet of Ministers meeting in June that focused on the issue of education. As a result of that meeting, several rectors lost their jobs as did then Minister of Education Annaamanov. President Berdimuhamedov also reportedly asked the Migration Service why so many students are studying abroad. (COMMENT: This strikes us as a question more appropriately directed to the Ministry of Education. END COMMENT.) Ministry of Education then decided to tighten up on students studying abroad.

15. (U) Ashyrov said that there were several reasons why Turkmen young people chose to study in Kyrgyzstan. The universities and institutes are more affordable than elsewhere in Central Asia. The quality of the schools is better than in Tajikistan or Uzbekistan and just as good as in some other places in the former Soviet Union. In fact, he said, several universities meet EU standards. Moreover, those who study in Kyrgyzstan have the option, depending on the school, of studying in Russian, Kyrgyz, or English.

16. (U) By September 1, the embassy had only had 3500 student visa applicants, which is 1000 less than had been the case in summer 2008. Ashyrov remarked that previously, the number of Turkmen students had increased each year, despite the fact that Kyrgyz schools did not advertise here or the difficult transportation links. He noted that students must either travel overland through Uzbekistan or fly to Kazakhstan.

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There have been rumors that Turkmenistan Airlines would open four new routes, including a once/week flight to Bishkek. Nevertheless, there have been no formal talks on this.

17. (C) Ashyrov said Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan do not have a formal agreement on education. However, President Bakiyev is scheduled to travel to Ashgabat in November, and it is possible that such an agreement will be signed then.

18. (SBU) Regarding AUCA, Ashyrov speculated that the fact that AUCA is a private school, despite the quality of its education, is a reason why students cannot receive permission to study there. He said the attitude of some officials is that the students are Turkmen citizens, and therefore, the government can decide where they study. He categorically denied that Turkmen students have participated in protests in Kyrgyzstan. Some contacts have told us that reports of students protesting in Kyrgyzstan and burning the Turkmenistan flag led officials to ban students from studying there.

19. (C) COMMENT: Ashyrov had heard that there might be some change in the situation on September 15. DFM Hajiyevev had told us the situation with students could change on September 1, but it remains the same. Whatever the reason or impetus for denying exit to students, it, in effect, denies them the fundamental human right of freedom of movement. END COMMENT.
CURRAN